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ABSTRACT

As an introduction to Afghani refugees in the United States, this report discusses various aspects of Afghani life both in the U.S. and Afghanistan. Within the discussion of Afghani cultural background, Afghani history, geography, livelihood, language, ethnicity, religion, art, food and dress, festivities, names, and social structure are reviewed. The section on education reveals that modern education has not yet had a wide-spread impact in Afghanistan. A review of the Afghani languages of Pashto and Dari points to possible problems for the Afghani English as a second language student. Issues covered are: (1) the pronunciation of consonants, (2) the pronunciation of vowels, (3) articles, (4) basic word order, and (5) modification of verbs. Based on this review of Afghani culture and language, implications for refugee orientation are discussed. (JK)

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CAL Fact Sheet Series #5

The Afghani

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September 1981

Highlights

Refugees

Growing dissatisfaction with the regime installed by a coup in April 1978 led to large refugee movements from Afghanistan into Pakistan and Iran. The entry of Soviet troops in December 1979 swelled the departures, until by now there are at least 3 million registered and unregistered Afghan refugees in Pakistan alone.

In the U.S.

Around 20,000 of the refugees have found their way to these shores so far. The Washington, D.C. area has been a particularly prominent center for resettlement. Refugees currently being admitted to the U.S. are predominantly relatives of earlier arrivals. They generally are well educated and belong to a high socioeconomic level back in Afghanistan. However, the middle and lower middle classes also constitute a significant number of Afghan refugees resettling in New York, California, and Nebraska.

The Country

This is a largely mountainous region much of which is not easily accessible. Outside the mountains, most land is high, dry, semi-desert plateau. Agriculture and pastoralism are the major sources of livelihood of 90% of the people. The principal languages are Dari, a variety of Persian, and Pashto, a language shared with the residents of the Northwest Frontier provinces of Pakistan. Afghanistan is a stronghold of traditional Islamic religion. Western-style education has never been widely accepted, and the literacy rate is still very low.

History

Armies moving into or through Afghanistan have been a frequent occurrence as far back as we know. In the 1700's Afghan conquests of territory outside Afghanistan began to build a sense of national destiny, but it was not until 1880-96 that a relatively stable, clearly organized state appeared that was a recognizable forerunner of the

Afghanistan of recent years. During the last century the country has followed a slow and troubled course towards development. After World War II, outside aid, mainly from the USSR and the U.S., increased the pace of modernization--up to the point where Afghanistan was once more enveloped by geopolitics on a larger stage.

I. Introduction

Afghanistan is a relatively inaccessible, mountainous, landlocked country of southwestern Asia, bounded by Pakistan, Iran, the Turkmen, Uzbek, and Tajik Soviet Socialist Republics, and for under forty miles has a frontier with China. It has roughly the same land area as the state of Texas. Estimates of its population vary widely; before the large-scale exodus began in 1978 it was probably somewhere around 16,000,000.

In spite of Soviet, U.S., and other assistance at building up infrastructure since World War II, Afghanistan still lacks many of the characteristics of more developed nations. It is one of the relatively few countries with no railroads. Until the discovery of natural gas in the north, which is piped to the Soviet Union, Afghanistan had no major exportable mineral resources. It does not raise crops that bring a high cash return on the world market. It exports cotton and wool, but does not as yet have enough textile factories to supply its own needs.

Refugees that up to now have entered the USA have mostly lived in Kabul, the capital. Many of them have been employed in government administration or in education. To a great extent they did not enter the U.S. as refugees; some are stranded students; some defected from diplomatic posts; some had found business or other excuses to leave the country in 1978 or 1979. Those already here are concerned to secure admission--obviously as refugees--for family members who have found asylum in Pakistan.

Significant groups of Afghans have settled in and around Washington, D.C., and also in New York, California, Texas, and Nebraska.

II. Cultural Background

A. History

Antiquity

Throughout history the territory that is now Afghanistan has been a

cross-roads for conquering armies and a jumping-off point for invasions of India. Its earliest functioning in that capacity that we can at present trace was at the time the Indo-European-speaking Aryans first began to penetrate the Indus valley about 1800 B.C.

The region first enters the light of definite history at the time of the establishment of the Persian Empire of Cyrus in 545 B.C. Persian rule, which lasted for the next two centuries, established "satrapies" (or governorships) that in general replaced former local kingdoms. Several of these were largely in Afghanistan: (1) Bactria in the north in the drainage of the Amu-Darya river (the "far Oxus" of antiquity); (2) Aria in the northwestern drainage of the Hari Rud and Murghab; (3) Arachosia in the Hilmand drainage system of the southwest; and (4) Gandhara including the Kabul River valley. Aria was mainly in present northeastern Iran, an area that has been closely linked with Afghanistan throughout history, in medieval times under the name of Khorasan; the name Aria is peculiarly significant, since both the ancient Iranians and the ancient Sanskrit speakers of northern India referred to themselves as Aryans.

From 330 B.C. to 327 B.C., the major part of the time spent on his famous conquests, Alexander the Great was campaigning in Afghanistan and adjacent territories to the north beyond the Oxus and to the east into India -- with the aid of cavalry recruited in Afghanistan. He overcame all local resistance and founded in Afghanistan cities on the Greek model that became the centers of a Hellenic-Iranian civilization for centuries thereafter.

In 307 B.C. Seleucus, one of Alexander's successors traded Alexander's conquest in India and eastern Afghanistan to an Indian ruler (Chandragupta, known to the Greeks as Sandracottus) in return for five hundred war elephants (presumably with their mahouts). For Seleucus this was a better bargain than it might seem, since these forces were crucial in the 301 B.C. battle of Ipsus that brought his side victory over other contestants for the control of the heritage of Alexandria. For what is now Afghanistan it introduced a millenium during which it was divided along often shifting frontiers between a part ruled from the east and representing Indic civilization and a part ruled from the west, at first Hellenic in culture (under Seleucids and then local dynasties) but subsequently more purely Iranian in culture (the Parthian and Sassanian Empires).

Islam

The armies of the Caliph came to conquer Afghanistan in AD 699. The Damascus Caliphs ruled until 750, followed for another hundred years by the Caliphs of Baghdad. After 850 the Caliph continued as the sovereign in theory, but in practice other more localized dynasties held the reins of power.

A major dynasty (of Turkic origin) began to rule Ghazni in southeastern Afghanistan in 977. The emperor Mahmud (988-1030) launched the first Islamic conquest of the Punjab, and ruled over most of the major center of Islamic civilization. The court was a focus of learning and of literature, where four hundred poets composed verses in Persian and Arabic. It was here that Firdausi put together the great masterpiece of early modern Persian literature Shah Nameh ("Book of the Kings").

The successor to these "Ghaznavids" was a dynasty ruling from Ghor, in central Afghanistan. Their empire included much of modern Pakistan and eastern Iran, and led to the establishment of the Sultanate of Delhi in India which long outlasted their domination in Afghnistan.

Paths of Conquest

In 1220 Genghis Khan brought his hordes into Afghanistan and spread destruction as great as anywhere else along the Mongols' routes. The traces of irrigation systems inoperative since his day can still be found in parts of the country, as can the ruins of some cities never rebuilt. For the next century and a half, parts of Afghanistan were under the control of various descendents of Genghis Khan. After Timulane (Tamberlane), perhaps a distant relative of Genghis Khan, had made himself master of central Asia, he next turned his attention to conquering Afghanistan in 1379-81, and from there launched his expedition into India in 1398. Afghanistan was rather central to the part of his empire that held together after Timurlane's death, and his son Shah Rukh (1405-47) made Herat his capital, as did the later Husain Baiqara (1470-1506): some buildings from these reigns still stand in that city.

Then, in 1504, Babur, a central Asian ruler driven from home, established a base in Kabul. From there he marched into India in 1925, and with an army of only 12,000 overcame the Delhi Sultanate, then in the control of the Afghan Lodi dynasty. Babur established the Moghul Empire that dominated India for nearly two hundred years and still ruled around Delhi into British times. Until 1739 the Moghuls controlled parts of Eastern Afghanistan, although often

resisted by indigenous tribal groups. The western part of Afghanistan came under the control of a newly resurgent Persian dynasty, identified with the Shiite branch of Islam, the "Safavids". For a century and a half, Afganistan was divided between two empires (somewhat as it had been from 300 BC to 700 AD). They frequently campaigned against each other, and the frontier between them shifted often with the varying fortunes of each. Kandahar changed hands five times during this period.

At a time when control of the Persian Empire seemed to be slipping, a Ghilzai Pashtun opportunist, Mahmud of Kandahar, invaded Persia and established a short-lived dynasty there from 1722-29. A tribal leader then arose in Iran who defeated the Afghan forces. He at first restored the former dynasty, but then made himself ruler as Nadir Shah in 1736. The next year he invaded Afghanistan and in 1739 went on to defeat the Moghuls in India and extract enormous wealth from their treasury. He also subsequently overpowered Bukhara and Khiva in central Asia, and defeated a Turkish invasion. His great military successes were not undergirded by any stable political framework, and after his murder in 1747 his empire rapidly disintegrated.

Afghan Empire

A charismatic young Pashtun cavalry leader in Nadir Shah's army, Ahmed Khan, fled the camp of the beheaded emperor and led his 4,000 troops to Kandahar. Near there an assembly of the notables of the Adali tribal confederacy elected him as their leader. This group, now renamed Durrani, then set out on a campaign of conquest. First they fell upon Ghazni, the stronghold of the Ghilji or Ghilzai, the other major confederacy of Pashtun tribes; they then secured Kabul, and launched a first invasion of India which was repulsed. The following year a second invasion defeated the Moghul army, and the territories west of the Indus river were ceded to the Afghans. Herat, the rest of northern Afghanistan, and northeast Persia were brought under control in 1750. At its height the empire of Amhed Shah Durrani covered modern Pakistan and Kashmir, Afghanistan, and the northeastern province of Iran, Khorasan. From one point of view, modern Afghanistan can be considered the part of this empire that was not subsequently whittled away. The Punjab was never a secure possession; six more reconquests were required in Ahmed Shah's lifetime, and it was lost to the Sikhs in 1756.

Fragmentation and Invasion

A good deal of the Empire held together through the succeeding reign of Ahmed's son Timur Shah (1772-93), but very uneasily and with constant rebellion.

Beyond that point, internal Afghan politics degenerated into a series of struggles among relatives for dominance in this region--with various claimants holding different parts of the country from time to time. The outside pressures on the country were shifting, however. In addition to two traditional threats, the Shah of Persia and the Emir of Bokhara, there were now two new players at the table, the Russians and the British. The intention of the British was to forestall the Russians, but it was as participants in the internal power struggles that the British launched the ill-fated First Anglo-Afghan War in 1839. (In January 1842 the attempt to evacuate 16,500 who had been with the British Army in Kabul left almost all of them dead or captured. Retaliatory actions later in the year by a second British force -- including the burning and looting of much of Kabul -- left lingering resentment).

The second Anglo-Afghan War, 1978-81, was more directly related to British nervousness about Russian advances. Into the confusion of resistance to the occupation came an Afghan prince Abdur Rahman, who appeared to be a Russian-backed aspirant to the throne. The British — for reasons that are not entirely clear — supported his claims in return for his pledge to abide by his briefly-reigning predecessor's agreement to conduct foreign relations only in concert with the British. Thus, the somewhat unlikely result of the second war was the appearance of a strong unified leader in Afghanistan.

Adbur Rahman (1880-1901)

The existence of a national entity that we can recognize as Afghanistan dates from this Amir's reign. He set about controlling and, to an extent, modernizing the country. He was the first ruler to have a sufficiently disciplined regular army to be able to subjugate the territories he nominally governed. Although he had no easy time of it, he managed to put down all opposing forces, and he then kept them under control with a heavy hand. He began overlaying an ethnic consciousness with a national consciousness.

The country came to have its present boundaries during this period. The eastern extension (the Wakhan Corridor) became part of Afghanistan in 1891

because the British wanted a buffer between Russia and India. (Abdur Rahman was reluctant to accept control of this area.) In 1892 the "Durrand Line" was demarcated between the control of the Amir and that of the British; this was to become the international boundary that divided the Pashto-speaking populations between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

20th Century

The religious leaders whose power Abdur Rahman had curtailed regained some of their former influence under the reign of Habibullah. During World War I a flirtation with the Central Powers went on, but no action resulted. Amanullah, who gained the throne after the assassination of his father, launched a series of administrative reforms and began the Third Anglo-Afghan War of 1919. The fighting lasted a month, and the ensuing negotiations took two and a half years. Even in the initial round, the British agreed to one of the principal Afghan objectives, recognition of their right to conduct their own foreign affairs. A treaty with the Soviet government was the first significant exercise of this new freedom. (In 1923 Amanullah resumed the title of King, which had been in abeyance for over a century.) This period is important to an Afghan because it was during 1919 that the Afghan government succeeded in gaining independence in conducting its foreign affairs.

Widespread resistance to efforts at rapid modernization, including encouragement of the unveiling of women, led to an unstable situation in which an ex-brigand adventurer controlled the country for nine months in 1929. Mohammad Nadir, a fairly distant cousin of the former King, regained control and became ruler with the promise of a more traditional orientation. He was assassinated in 1933 and succeeded by his nineteen-year-old son Mohammad Zahir. Afghanistan gradually developed more relations with the outside world, at this time principally with the Axis powers--who seemed less a threat than either England or the Soviet Union.

After World War II the position of the half of the Pashtun population in newly independent Pakistan became the principal foreign-policy issue for Afghans.

The postwar period greatly accelerated development efforts. A large-scale irrigation system with two major dams was undertaken for the Hilmand River valley with American support and in cooperation with an American firm; the results fell far short of rather inflated expectations. From 1950 on, the

USSR, and eventually other socialist-block nations, supported extensive projects. For a while, as an increasing number of basic improvements were under construction in Afghanistan as American or Soviet projects, the technical personnel from the two countries frequently found themselves cooperating in the field for the benefit of Afghanistan.

In 1964 a new constitution was adopted, although never fully implemented, that looked toward development of a parliamentary democracy. In a coup in 1973, the King was ousted by his first cousin, who had been Prime Minister from 1953-63. Afghan rulers had often been overthrown by cousins in days past, but instead of making himself King, Daoud declared the country a republic with himself as president. Dauod died in a leftist coup in April 1978. Within a year the widespread perception of the new regime as anti-Islamic and pro-Russian had led to uprisings in most parts of the country. At least 400,000 refugees crossed over into Pakistan and about 60,000 into Iran. Leaders of one of the coup factions had been shunted aside as ambassadors abroad, then later ordered back as accused instigators of a plot--at which point they disappeared. Soviet military aid for the suppression of insurgency was not succeeding. In December 1979 the Soviet army and the ex-ambassadors entered Afghanistan together; one of the latter, Babrak Karmal (a longtime leftist leader) was installed in Kabul. The presence of a foreign army increased the exodus over the border. By late 1981 there are about 3,000,000 Afghans in Pakistan and 250,000 in Iran.

The resistance to the Soviet-backed Karmal government is generally supplied with arms through Pakistan, purchased with money from Arab state. This has made occupation difficult for the Soviet troops.

B. Geography

Afghanistan is a land of great contrasts, having mountains covered with perpetual snow in the northeast, sandy or rocky deserts in the southwest and not enough arable land.

Most of this landlocked country is mountainous, consisting of the Hindu Kush range running from northeast to southwest nearly halfway through the country and numerous other ranges that fan out from it. The topography provides striking scenery but difficult communication. The snow that falls on the mountains, mostly from December through April, furnishes most of Afghanistan's water supply. Even there, most areas have only a rainfall equivalent of fif-

teen inches. The relatively lowland areas along the country's northern, western, and southern boundaries are all deficient in rainfall and require irrigation water--that originates as snow in the mountains--to practice agriculture. As in the 1971-72 drought, this supply is at times insufficient. About one-eighth of the land area of Afghanistan is cultivated. Considerably more (up to around one-fifth) is considered arable if adequate irrigation could be provided. A great deal of the water runs away in destructive spring floods.

The Hindu Kush mountains and extensions of them to the southwest divide the country into a northwestern and a southeastern half. The passes between are generally impassable in winter. The two halves differ in many ways, historically, culturally, and ecologically. One differentiating factor are the wind-blown deposits of soil from central Asia, which collect annually on the northern plains and foothills, maintaining fertility wherever there is sufficient water for cultivation, and pasture where there is less. The southern and southeastern agricultural regions lack any such automatic replenishment.

The climate of Afghanistan varies enormously, according to altitude, and also according to the influence of regional weather patterns. The range between high summer and low winter temperatures is large. Almost all places have some freezing weather, and those below actual mountain zones have temperatures in the 90's. The northern plains, the southwestern areas near the deserts, and places east of and below Kabul near the Pakistan border, are the principal regions where temperatures regularly pass the 100° F mark. A wide day-to-night range is typical, as is a great deal of day-to-day change, particularly in spring and fall. The lower Kabul River valley has very mild winters, so that Jalalabad has long been the wintering spot for the elite of the country.

The area along both sides of the Afghan-Iranian border is one of the great wind corridors of the world. A south wind blows continuously from June through September, and not infrequently it reaches a velocity of 100 m.p.h. Wind mills with vertical vanes and a vertical shaft — an ancient invention of this region -- are still much used for grinding wheat — which is harvested during the windy period.

C. Livelihood

Most Afghans are farmers and herdsmen. Even those who engage in crafts

such as pottery, weaving, shoemaking, and housebuilding are also part-time agriculturalists. The army and the government administration are the only large-scale employers outside the agricultural sector.

Wheat is the principal crop, raised on over a quarter of the cultivated land; usually only wheat and barley are grown on unirrigated land. For trade purposes grapes and orchard fruit (dried or fresh), together with walnuts and almonds, are important since they find a ready market abroad and ordinarily furnish over a third of the country's export earnings. Cotton is also a commercial crop.

Sheep are raised in most parts of the country, by people who are chiefly farmers, by semi-sedentary groups that depend mainly on their flocks but also do some subsistence farming, and by the estimated 14% of the population that are still nomads moving to summer pastures in the central mountains and winter quarters in lower, warmer areas near the edges of the country (and, until international politics intervened in 1961, also in Pakistan). Some goats are normally herded together with the sheep. The skins of the qarakul sheep ("Persian lamb") of northern Afghanistan are the country's most profitable product. Wool is also an export commodity. Dairy cattle, used also as draft animals, are found in most parts of the country.

Gathering pistachio nuts that grow wild on grazing land is an important late-summer economic activity. Mulberries are significant as the first major food source that becomes available in the spring.

In towns there are traders and full-time craft specialists and tea houses and schools, but only about 300 such centers exist in Afghanistan, which is still a land of small villages. Only the few large cities, and particularly the capital, Kabul, have a modernized economic sector. Beside these there are a very small number of factories and mining centers in other locations.

Until recent years hardly any Afghans left the country seeking employment, but in the 1970's an appreciable number found work in the oilfields of Iran and of the countries along the western side of the Persian Gulf.

D. Language and Ethnicity

The principal languages of Afghanistan are Pashto and Persian (which in Afghanistan is usually known as Dari). Both are official languages of the country, and most educated Afghans can use both. Schools use either one

medium of instruction, according to which predominates in the local area, and teach the other as a subject. Both languages are members of the Iranian branch of the Indo-European family of languages. The fact that they are related is obvious even to a casual observer, although the historical connection is not very close. There are two main divisions of Iranian languages, western and eastern. Persian is the principal West Iranian language and Pashto is the principal East Iranian language. The time when they originally began to split apart must go back to several centuries B.C.

Geographically, Dari is the predominant language of the Kabul area and also of the regions to the northwest of the Hindu Kush mountains while Pashto is principally located to the southeast of the mountains.

Numerically, it has been estimated that Pasho is the native language of 48% of the population and Dari of 36%. (Uzbek and Turkmen, Turkic languages spoken along the northern border are next in importance.) Of the 16% whose mother tongue is something else, it has also been estimated that 14% would tend to use Dari as their second language and 2% would use Pashto. Adding in these would give precisely a 50-50 demographic split.

In fact, the position of the two languages is roughly equal, but there are quite different types of pressures favoring each. The Pashtuns have been the ruling group in Afghanistan, and have tended to set the tone for the entire nation. Their language serves as a national symbol since it is primarily a language associated with Afghanistan, even though around half its speakers live in Pakistan. Furthermore, for all their frequent and violent fighting among themselves, the Pashtuns constitute a single ethnic group. The Dari speakers are more diverse. The principal part of them are those known in Afghanistan as Tajiks, who occupy the territory from Kabul to the extreme northern tip of the country and constitute around 22% of the population. Other groups are the Shiite Farsiwan of the west, and two sets of farmer-pastoralists, those in the west-central part of the country, centering on the province of Ghor, known as Aimaq (a Turkish word for 'tribe'); and, in the center of the country, the Hazara. These latter two were central Asian groups who moved into Afghanistan and eventually became Persianized in language.

On the other hand, Persian is a language with a vast cultural and literary tradition. The first shoots of classical Persian literature began to appear in the ninth century. (All Persian since the Muslim conquest is, somewhat misleadingly, referred to as "Modern Persian" in distinction from the "Middle

Persian" of the preceding Zoroastrian centuries. "Old Persian" refers to the inscriptions of Darius.) During the late medieval period, a Persian civilization developed that embraced Iran, Afghanistan, the Muslim-ruled parts of India. It included much of Central Asia, particularly the cities of what is now Soviet Uzbekistan (Khiva, Bukhara, Samarkand, Tashkent, Kokand, and Ferghana). Throughout this region, Persian became the language of administration, and the small world of the literati made it their principal medium of expression, whatever their native language, much as Latin dominated in Western Europe. It was presumably during this period that Persian replaced other Iranian languages as the common speech in much of northern Afghanistan. (The wide-spread influence of classical Persian literature was long-lasting; there are present-day Pakistani authors who still compose some of their poetry in classical Persian.)

Pashto literature, in contrast, had as its self-confessed creator Khushal Khan Khattak who lived from 1613 to 1690 — a brilliant warrior opposing the Moghul emperor and a poet of wide-ranging interests. It has continued to be cultivated in Afghanistan to a far lesser extent than has literature in Dari.

Dari is also a much more urban language. Even where the countryside is solidly Pashto-speaking, cities and towns have a large proportion of Dari speakers. Dari is the language in which business is most frequently conducted.

The relation of Pashto and Dari has often been compared to that between German and English. For instance, Pashto nouns are assigned different genders (masculine or feminine, no German-like neuter), they have nominative and accusative case endings, and a variety of endings for forming the plural, but Dari (like English), has few such grammatical devices, although they were important at an earlier stage of each of these languages.

Both Dari and Pashto are written using adaptations of the Arabic alphabet. For Dari it is supplemented by four extra consonants for sounds not occurring in classical Arabic. Pashto uses these and adds eight more letters.

The standard for Dari is the usage of educated speakers in Kabul. It differs in numerous ways from the standard Persian of Iran (Farsi): particularly in the vowel system, which continues as it was at an earlier time, without the changes that have taken place in Iranian Persian. In written form, however, the two are closer than when spoken, since the literary standard in both countries is oriented toward classical Persian. There exists also another

standard for Persian in the neighboring Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic, where it is written using a modified Russian (Cyrillic) alphabet.

E. Religion

Afghanistan is one of the most solidly Muslim countries in the world. The overwhelming majority follow the mainstream branch of Islam, the Sunni tradition.

An originally political movement claimed the right of the descendents of Ali (the fourth Caliph) and his wife Fatima (the daughter of Muhammad) to be the leaders of Islam. In time this developed into a separate branch of Islam, the Shiites, with theological, legal, and devotional differences from the majority. A dispute over succession to leadership of the Shiites in 765 separated the two principal branches of that movement: the Imami Shiites, who are now the dominant religious group in Iran and southern Iraq; and the Ismaili Shiites, found mostly in India and led by the Agha Khan. Both of these sects are represented in Afghanistan. The more numerous Imami Shiites are found among the Dari-speaking Farsiwan of the west, the Hazara of the central mountains, and the largely urban originally Turkic Qizilbash. The Ismaili Shiites include some Hazara, but most are in the extreme northeast: some Tajik and the speakers of four East Iranian "Pamir" languages. The proportion of Shiites in Afghanistan has been variously estimated at 10-20%. (Since Shiites on principle are permitted to dissemble about their affiliation, no reliable figure would ever be likely.)

In orthodox Sunni circles, four separate traditions developed involving differences in legal principals and ritual practices (especially purification). Sunni Afghans follow the Hanafi school, which originally was the teaching of the jurists of Baghdad and came to be the most widespread in the Islamic world.

Mystically-oriented Muslims developed practices designed to make them aware of a closeness to God. In the twelfth century such practitioners crystallized into organized groups, usually under an authoritarian leader. The participant "sufis" or "dervishes" in Afghanistan generally belong to the most ancient and widest spread Qadiri "order" or "brotherhood" (the usual term in English, although the Arabic word for the groups means "paths"). Much of the poetry in Pashto as well as in Persian is sufi-inspired, even though the general influence of sufi leaders is less pervasive in Afghanistan than in

many Islamic countries.

For the most part it is the folk level of Islam that is important in Afghanistan. The local religious leaders are not usually well-instructed: they are mostly peasants with a part-time additional activity, parallel to that of village house-builders.

Afghanistan is dotted with much-visited graves and other shrines dedicated to Muslim holy men, largely sufis. There is a great pilgrimage center at Mazar-i-Sharif, which is said to contain the tomb of Ali, the fourth Caliph (the same one whose tomb other Shiite pilgrims believe they venerate in Iraq near Kufa where he was assasinated in 661).

In upper valleys of the tributaries that run into the Kabul river from the north between Kabul and the Pakistan border there used to be a pocket of paganism. It was called Kafiristan ("land of the heathen") until 1896 when Abdur Rahman invaded it and forcibly converted the inhabitants to Islam — after which he renamed these valleys Nuristan ("land of light"). The Nuristanis of today are a very distinct ethnic group in Afghanistan, with their own type of dress, dwellings, food, sports, and general way of life. The four languages of Nuristan are thought to form a link between the Iranian languages and the Indo-Aryan languages of northern India.

F. Art

Most art in present-day Afghanistan is of a handicraft nature. Embroidery is widely practiced. The caps around which turbans are wound are usually decorated according to designs which are characteristic of the locality. Shirts, vests, and coats may be embroidered — particularly ones for wear on special occasions.

Rug-weaving from the extensive wool production not only is utilitarian but has also furnished an important export. Saddlebags and horse blankets are also artistically woven. In addition some silk is produced and woven.

Metal working has produced silver jewelry and elaborately designed dagger handles as well as trays and bowls. Lapis lazuli, of which Afghanistan has been a source for millennia, is made into jewelry. Folk artists paint colorful scenes on the body-panels of trucks. Herat is noted for glassware and Istalif (in the mountains not far from Kabul) produces a special blue-glazed type of pottery. (The architecturally notable buildings in Afghanistan date from pre-modern times, and certain remarkable statuary from pre-Muslim days.)

G. Food and Dress

Afghan bread, leavened or unleavened, is baked thin on a very hot fired-clay surface. Typically a round pottery vessel whose sides come in toward the bottom (a truncated paraboloid) is buried in the earth and heated by coals in the middle of the bottom. The dough is formed and slapped onto the hot concave sides where it bakes rapidly. Bread is normally eaten with any other food consumed.

The main feature of a major meal is a rice pilau, usually with boiled mutton or chicken. A sauce of tomatoes and other vegetables (frequently including potatoes) and pickled vegetables are likely to be served on the side. The rendered tallow from the tail of the fat-tailed sheep is widely used in cooking, as is also clarified butter.

With the extensive cattle and sheep herds of the country, dairy products are an important part of the diet. Cheese, buttermilk, and yogurt are widely used. Curd is also thoroughly drained and then dried in small hard balls for future use in cooking. Boiled curd is often eaten for breakfast. Fresh vegetables and fruit are plentiful.

In rural Afghanistan regular meals are not eaten between breakfast and supper, but people carry around nuts and dried fruit for energy during the day.

The usual beverage is tea, which constitutes one of Afghanistan's major imports. In general black tea is used southeast of the Hindu Kush mountains, while green tea is preferred in the northwestern part of the country.

The ordinary clothing of men is a rather baggy pair of trousers with a drawstring at the waist and a loose long-sleeved shirt reaching about to the knees. Over this (when it is cool) goes a vest. Coats worn in rural areas are often brightly striped, and are quilted for winter warmth. Turbans -- traditionally white but now of any color — are wound around the locally favored type of turban caps. Pashtuns and others who imitate them leave a couple of feet of turban cloth hanging down, while most of those in the rest of the country tuck the end in. Pushtun men customarily have their hair cut off square at ear-lobe length. Other groups have their heads shaved about once a month.

Women often wear pleated trousers under a dress and cover their heads with a shawl. Well-to-do women in towns and those of religiously conservative families in cities appear in public enveloped in a chadri, a one-piece pleated

rayon or silk ground-length covering with latticed embroidery over the eyes. (Hard-working village and tribal women have never gone about so encumbered.) In cities, European dress styles have become increasingly common.

H. Festivities

Afghan social occasions are predominantly family and extended family affairs. Picnics are important events on Fridays, the official government and religious holiday for the Afghans. Many parties are for male or female groups. Even if both sexes are invited, they often participate separately outside urban areas. Weddings are the greatest occasions for celebration in Afghanistan. After several preliminary observances, the ceremonies connected with the actual wedding are in many places spread over a three-day period, preferably in September. In various localities practices differ, but are fairly elaborate in any case.

The birth of a first child is the occasion for a day-long celebration, most elaborate if the child is a boy. Subsequent births receive lesser attention. The sixth night after a birth is observed with an "open house" for friends of the family, who bring small gifts.

Boys are usually circumcised about the age of seven (after which they begin wearing turbans). The circumcision is the occasion for a feast, likely to involve wrestling contests and other demonstrations of manliness.

Although funerals are hardly festivities, commemorative meals may take place several times in the year following a death. (Former large-scale food distributions connected with funerals were made illegal in 1950.)

Probably the most important annual observance is the ancient Persian New Year celebration Nawruz at the beginning of spring on March 21. It is marked by special foods, sporting events, and attempts to secure good fortune for the coming year.

During the month of Ramadhan (Ramazan is Afghan pronunciation) of the seasonally-shifted Islamic lunar year, no nourishment is to be taken during daylight. The first day of the following month brings the "breaking up of fasting" marked by feasting, visits of friends, and gifts of new clothing, especially to children.

The second following month, the last in the Islamic calendar, is the time of pilgrimages to Mecca. One major observance of the pilgrims is the sacrifice of a sheep on the tenth day of the month; at this time in Afghanistan

also sheep are ritually slaughtered and the meat widely distributed by those who can afford to do so, and friends exchange presents.

I. Names

Afghan names are for the most part Islamic. The Pashtun population uses non-Arabic names frequently. The father's oldest brother is considered the normal person to pick the name the child will bear. The name is usually officially conferred by a religious leader on the third day after birth.

Family names are a recent innovation in Afghanistan. Where they have been adopted, they usually have a geographic reference or a connection with the professional interests of the persons starting to use them. Since they are mostly new, close relatives, even brothers, may have opted for different ones.

Pashtuns normally identify themselves by the tribul lineage-division to which they belong, Tajiks by the river valley of their origin, and Uzbeks by the pre-modern political unit of their area.

J. Social Structure

In rural Afghanistan and even in the cities to a great extent, people live in extended-family units — a group of patrilineally related males, their wives, and their unmarried female relatives. The women of the households form a single work group and care for and discipline the children. The senior active male member, typically the grandfather, controls all expenditures and the grandmother all domestic work assignments.

Leading families are recognized on the basis of land or livestock ownership, their reputation for religious leadership, or for having furnished men who exhibit the ideal Afghan personality type of the warrior-poet.

Tribal affiliation is still the most significant organizing principle in parts of rural Afghan society. Tribal units have strong patrilineal organization — something that perhaps comes almost by nature to nomads and those with a remembered and idealized nomadic past. The patrilineal principle is also strongly supported by Islam.

Afghans may operate at many different levels of group identification. The cultural pattern is one of competition between equivalent units but uniting with these competitors against outsiders. This begins at the level of competition between male first cousins, and works its way up through lineages, sub-tribes, tribes, the Durrani and Ghilzai tribal confederations among the

Pashtuns, to ethnic-group rivalries. Though never allowing any of these conflicts to be entirely suppressed, the pattern allows nearly all Afghans to unite, at least at times, against outside threats, as is to great extent the case against the current Soviet presence in Afghanistan.

Within the local division of a Pashtun tribe or in a village, an assembly of all the adult males, the Jirgah, decides important matters by vote. (This pattern has also spread to a great many non-Pashtuns.) Larger units function by assemblies of local leaders. And it has been a long-standing tenet of Afghan society that ultimate sovereignty rests in a national Loya Jirgah convoked of notables from the whole country -- as with the assemblies that approved the constitutions of 1931,
1964, and 1977.

III. Education

Modern education has not yet had a wide-spread impact in Afghanistan. Furthermore, traditional Koranic education was less intensively cultivated here than in many Islamic countries.

In 1960 it was estimated that only 3% of the Afghan population could read or write. A mid-seventies government estimate of 12.7% seemed obviously inflated for any solid achievement in literacy, since other estimates indicated that under 20% of the elementary school-aged population was enrolled in classes. Literacy in Dari is much more prevalent than literacy in Pashto. Schools are better attended in Dari-speaking areas; about 65% of elementary-school pupils (and 88% of the female ones!) are found there. Since it is the language of most business, the social utility of Dari literacy is more obvious, and reading material is far more plentiful, including, as it does, publications in Persian from Iran.

The percentage of a given age-group in school falls off sharply at the higher levels. Even though only a small proportion of Afghans complete a high-school course, there have been insufficient employment opportunities to utilize them, since nearly 90% of the labor force is engaged in basic agricultural and pastoral production, and government service is the only field requiring large numbers of educated people.

Although the three million refugees in Pakistan are largely rural people with little schooling, the ones who enter the United States, if not high-school educated are at least likely to have attended school for several years

in an urban setting. The educational system of Afghanistan consists of six years of primary school, and six years of lycee or high school. Immediately following this is the "Pohantun", a Pashto word for college. The original models in organizing it were German and French. Higher education has been diverse (although limited in numbers) and has been influenced by various recent trends in the more developed countries.

IV. Implications for Learning English as as Second Language

According to information currently available, the refugees in the USA represent the more urban, more educated, and more sophisticated strata of the population. It seems best for purposes of English teaching to assume that in general they are also familiar with Pashto as well as Dari. Knowing both languages presents a better chance for their being already used to patterns similar to those of English. For instance, there is an f-sound in Dari, but none in ordinary colloquial Pashto; Pashto on the other hand uses sounds similar to the vowel of English hut that are not found in Dari. Apart from specifics, knowing two rather different languages gives more perspective on the way languages may differ.

In what follows, points will be mentioned only if they seem problematical for a hypothetical combined Dari-Pashto speaker.

A. Pronunciation of Consonants

The th-sounds of English, voiceless as in thin and voiced as in then are lacking in these languages. In Arabic as pronounced in Afghanistan the letter tha' is given the sound of s and the letter dhal is given the sound of z.

The Dari or Pashto word rang 'color' has a final g-sound which English rang lacks. (They end like the ng of anger rather than hangar.)

Pashto and Afghan Persian have only w and not v, although v is characteristic of other varieties of Persian. Afghans can be expected to need practice in the contrast between wine and vine and the like.

The trilled r as pronounced in Afghanistan is unlike an American r.

B. Pronunciation of Vowels

English makes more distinctions among vowels than are found in the Afghan languages. Because of considerable difference in the details of pronunciation in various types of Persian and Pashto, the way in which learners will tend to

hear English vowel sounds are not easily predictable. It would seem that distinctions between closely related vowel sounds may produce problems in a number of instances:

meat vs. mitt
mitt vs. met
met vs. mat
hat vs. hot.

C. Articles

Persian and Pashto have rather complex ways of indicating definiteness and specificity of nouns, but these are quite unlike the use of the definite article in English, so that omission or misuse of the is likely to persist in the English of Afghan learners.

D. Basic Word Order

Verbs generally come at the end of a clause in either Dari or Pashto. The usual order is Subject-Object-Verb, so that Afghans following native patterns might tend to say such things as:

My friend a book bought.

That man his dog beats.

E. Modification of Verbs

Adverbial expressions, unless particularly emphatic, regularly precede the verb, providing a model that would indicate:

My friend tomorrow will arrive.

Neighbors in the street gathered.

Your friend well dances.

When there is also an object, there are precedents for either:

The child a cat in the house keeps.

or:

My brother tonight supper didn't eat.

V. Implications for Orientation

Although the Afghan refugees who have come to this country so far are largely from among the elite of Afghanistan, and are more sophisticated, urbanized, and acquainted with Western ways than most of their countrymen, they are not really familiar with the rest of the world and are likely to

experience considerable problems of adjustment in the United States. To the extent that less urban Afghans may join them here, they will be far less prepared to deal with patterns of living that they have only vaguely heard about. Most Afghans coming here are very tied to "home" and are very concerned about the political situation there. They may be reluctant to talk about their country for fear of causing problems for family still at home. Many still feel very much displaced, unsure of the possibilities of returning, and ambivalent about their commitment to a new life in America.

Afghanistan is still a country where most problems are worked out on a personal basis or through a family representative. The extent to which most matters in the U.S. are handled through institutions that deal with clients in an essentially impersonal way is peculiarly unnatural from an Afghan perspective.

The Islamic heritage is tremendously important to most Afghans (even though some more modern-oriented ones may be critical of certain practices they view as superstitious or of the narrowness of some religious leaders). Abstaining from pork is likely to continue to be significant even if they find it difficult to keep up many other Islamic practices. For example, most Afghans will drink beer or liquor. In fact, not to offer alcoholic drink to an Afghan might be considered impolite. Stronger feelings about modesty are likely to set them off from Americans. Traditional feelings about the impurity of the left hand are not easily forgotten.

Two of the most important themes of Afghan culture are honor and hospitality. To the extent to which Americans who refugees encounter appear to deal honorably and hospitably, the fewer the problems in adjusting to this country are likely to be. For Afghans, self-esteem and sensitivity to the feelings of others dictate the avoidance of direct confrontations.

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